

At nearly the same time, a section of LAV-ATs (Anti-Tank variants), equipped with TOW missiles, was moving to the south in order to reinforce the engaged security element. The lead vehicle commanded by Sergeant Brian Siebert, observed a T-72 moving south on the opposite side of the river. Sergeant Siebert took aim with his thermal sight and destroyed the tank with a single TOW shot. The tank erupted in a huge fireball that continued to grow as the ammo inside cooked off. The AT section immediately stowed their turrets and continued south along the road as they continued to search for enemy across the Diyala. Suddenly, an F-14 Tomcat appeared overhead and flew right over the LAV section. First Lieutenant Cameron Albin, the platoon leader, took notice of the aircraft and inquired if the FiST was controlling CAS. The answer came back negative, and Major Nash tried desperately to contact the Tomcat's pilot. It appeared that the aircraft was posturing for an attack on friendly positions, and the jet aircraft roared by another time. Suddenly a tremendous explosion erupted directly between the two LAV-ATs, obscuring them from the rest of the company. Luckily, the vehicles had been traveling along a raised road with a berm off to the right side. The Navy F-14 had dropped a 500-pound bomb directly in between the vehicles, but on the other side of the berm. The section escaped with only a minor injury to Sergeant Siebert, who immediately called back to the company alerting them of the incident and advising everyone to display their air panels. Major Nash finally reached a section of Marine F/A-18Ds on the TAD net and instructed them to announce on the emergency 'guard' frequency that a fratricide incident had just occurred between 1st LAR and an F-14. The Navy Tomcat disappeared and never returned.

Other units in RCT-5 also saw action that day. At first light, the battery advance parties of 2/11, led by the battalion survey section and with a platoon from Charlie Company, 1/5, moved through the "hornet's nest" to prepare PAs near Hatif Haiyaw. The party started to take fire from a date grove to the west of their positions. Hearing the small arms fire, the platoon from Charlie Company reoriented and engaged a BMP-2 as well as dismounted infantry threatening the artillery position areas. The security platoon requested artillery support to engage the Iraqis. The 2/11 forward CP received the call for fire, and issued a fire order to 5/11 to engage the BMP and dismounts that were only 800 meters away. Once the artillery started falling, an AT-4 was used to destroy the BMP and the resistance was quickly mopped up.

As would be the case for the next five days, most units on the east side of the Diyala received sporadic mortar and artillery fire in and around their positions. The enemy indirect fire was inaccurate, and Marines quickly assumed a degree of nonchalance on hearing the sound of explosions. In fact, Marines were more likely to jump at the sound of the Division's own guns, as 11th Marines attacked enemy firing units located by counter-battery radar with a vengeance. Sometimes, however, the Iraqi cannoneers and mortarmen got lucky:

On 5 April, the Corpsmen in the Field Train were called into action when two mortar rounds impacted, injuring two Marines. Chief Kelly Richardson was treating Lance Corporal Frederick Evans for shrapnel wounds to his foot and leg when Lance Corporal Evans began to go into shock. Chief Richardson maintained his composure and provided some comforting words to the wounded Marine: "I'll see you at the next Marine Corps Ball. You'll be easy to spot because you'll have all the ribbons and you'll be surrounded by all the women." Lance Corporal Evans and the other wounded Marine were successfully treated and evacuated.

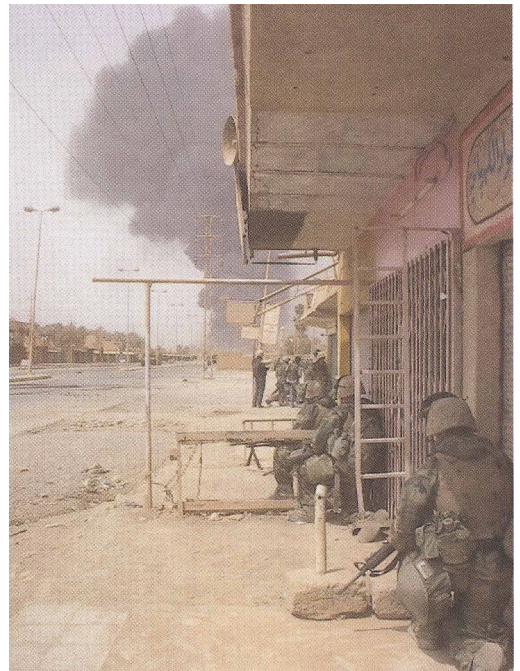
Preparing to Enter the City



Selection of maneuver objectives was made easier because of the preparatory planning the Division had done in Kuwait.

Company FAC. The India FAC took control of 'Diecast 32' (the B-52) and set up a Mk-82 string. The total preparation time from check in of aircraft to ready for drop was approximately 17 minutes, and the B-52 dropped 17 Mk-82s on target. The ironies abounded in an aged platform built for a now-defunct strategic mission dropping modern weapons in support of an infantry company's close fight. Later that day, 3/4 was able to use the battalion's Dragon Eye UAV to reconnoiter forward to the two bridges crossing the Diyala in RCT-7's zone. Both bridges were, surprisingly, still intact. Lieutenant Colonel McCoy briefly considered pushing forward to seize the bridges there and then, but the RCT had been given a limit of advance short of the canal. Additionally, Bravo Company, 1st Tanks (attached to 3/4) came upon a compound with many high-tech machines covered in tarps and sandbags located outside. Suspicious of having discovered a WMD sensitive site, the attached infantry platoon cleared the compound. The research facility was completely abandoned, but had a large number of computers and precision machines. The battalion focused on securing this site, and had its hands full clearing out enemy resistance on the east bank of the river. It was late in the day, and attacking across the Diyala would have to be left until the next morning.

In the southern portion of the zone, RCT-7 had a number of actions ongoing. Its main effort was reconnoitering the two crossing sites for the fight into Baghdad. Third Battalion, 4th Marines was in the lead, and cleared in zone to the southeastern outskirts of Baghdad. The Fedeyeen fighters continued to use ambush techniques against the Marines' advance. The Battalion continued to prosecute detected targets with CAS. The air officer for 3/4 got some 'non-routine' close air support while calling in on some vehicles across the river. A B-52 had just checked in to support the advance, and was pushed to the India



Marines from 1st Platoon, India Company, 3^d Battalion, 4th Marines clear the town of Az Za'Faraniyah in preparation for seizing the southern Diyala bridge.

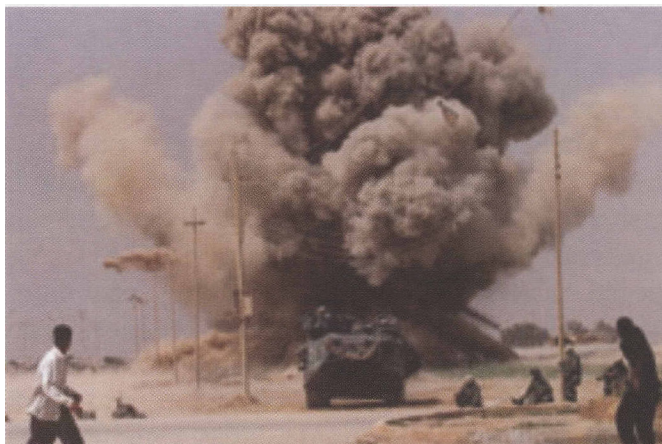
Salman Pak

The remainder of RCT-7 continued to conduct operations along Highway 6 to search out and destroy enemy resistance and ammunition caches. South of Highway 6 was an isolated peninsula formed by a bend of the Tigris River. The Regime had long used this peninsula, near the town of Salman Pak, to conduct a variety of activities in an isolated setting. There had been reports a few days earlier of a large concentration of Saddam Fedeyeen at the Salman Pak military facility. Lieutenant Colonel Mike Belcher's 3/7 was tasked to conduct a raid on the facility in order to eliminate the threat to the Division's southern flank. The facility housed a terrorist training camp, the II Republican Guard Forces Corps (RGFC) Headquarters, and a presidential palace. The battalion commander's plan called for India Company to secure the training camp and headquarters, while Lima Company secured the palace. Kilo Company would provide the reserve and Tanks would provide a blocking position to the north. Two combined teams of operatives from other US clandestine forces would support the Battalion's attack and intelligence collection efforts.

Because of the potential to catch a large number of enemy fighters in this cul-de-sac, 3/7's timeline was accelerated by five hours. The attack that was planned and briefed for 1800Z now had to commence no later than 1300Z due to the rapidly developing situation. Major Mike Samarov, the 3/7 Operations Officer, quickly contacted each of the battalion's elements to adjust the attack. Departing on the new timetable, Third platoon from Delta Company, 3^d LAR Battalion, encountered a significant enemy ambush by well-entrenched Iraqi paramilitary soldiers. The Marines defeated the ambush through a combination of suppressive fires and maneuver. Several LAVs became mired in the muddy Tigris terrain, but were able to extract themselves while under enemy fire.

By 1430Z, with the battalion poised to strike, they were informed that the pre-planned unguided air strikes were cancelled. It was decided to strike the lengthy target list with artillery and observed CAS only, keeping effects of unguided fires as far as possible from the critical sites to be exploited for their intelligence value. Working feverishly during a 30-minute artillery preparation fire, the Battalion Fire Support Coordinator, Captain Daniel Schmitt, and the Air Officer, Captain David "Digger" Kulik, assembled six fixed wing and one rotary wing section from the available close air support stack. Briefing desired

munitions points of impact in rapid succession, the FiST addressed all necessary targets to support the Battalion's scheme of maneuver. Supporting the efforts of the Battalion FiST cell, Captain Philip "PB" Smith and Major William "Wagon Burner" Dunn, forward air controllers



Marines detonate an arms cache containing Iraqi landmines and artillery ammunition.

for Companies India and Lima respectively, controlled fixed and rotary wing aviation on additional key targets. Captain Smith recounts:

“After the Hornets dropped their JDAMs, I had them run multiple passes with rockets. Good thing they came loaded with rocket pods, because it enabled us to hit targets of opportunity without the collateral damage to the surrounding buildings. It also afforded them a real good look at what we were about to go into, and I had a very comfortable feeling that we had destroyed everything that moved.”

An enemy surface to air missile battery fired at the Cobras during one strike on their objective. The AH-1W helicopters pulled back and the artillery forward observer for Company L, First Lieutenant Walter Maessen, called in a battalion concentration of artillery. Once again, the effects of combined arms were devastating to the Iraqi defenders. The efficacy of surface fires, air fires, and maneuver all working together was repeatedly demonstrated, as the enemy SAM battery was knocked out and the cobras returned to the fight, unhindered by the anti-air threat.

The battalion's first elements broke through the compound gates at 1720Z that night. Mechanical difficulties hindered Lima's advance, but they eventually completed the attack. By 2000Z they secured the presidential palace. Little more than an hour later, the suspected terrorist training camp and headquarters were secured. Buses, trains, scuba equipment, and even an airplane mockup confirmed the area as a terrorist training camp. Intelligence exploitation of the sites was conducted, while the battalion concluded operations to secure remaining objectives. By 0300Z the next morning, 3/7 reported all objectives secure. Even though the reported enemy force had disappeared before the attack, the uncovering of the terrorist camp and a significant amount of Regime documentation marked the operation as a resounding success. Intelligence exploitation teams used trucks to haul away the voluminous documentation uncovered.

Division Shaping Efforts

Pushing fires across to the west side of the Diyala River, the Division worked to reduce the risk to RCT-7 in a shaping effort against Regime forces in the Rasheed military complex. The Rasheed area had been a suspected chemical weapons storage site, and was known to house a number of Regime helicopters at its airfield. Division Fires and the 11th Marines took it as their special mission to reduce this pocket of capability, and to eliminate the threat potentially posed by a Regime helicopter loaded with chemical munitions. From both the Division Forward and then the Division Main CPs, Division drove B-52, F/A-18, AH-1W, DPICM, and HE artillery missions against the enemy equipment and facilities observed at the airfield and scattered throughout the huge Rasheed military complex. The shaping fires were ultimately effective, and the Rasheed complex offered little resistance when uncovered two days later.

In an economy of force measure, the Division detached 2^d LAR Battalion from RCT-1, and assigned it the security mission for the critical 150 km stretch of Highway 6 back to An Numaniyah and the Tigris River crossing. The fact that Barbarian was able to cover such an extended battlespace was testimony to the agility and flexibility of an LAV mounted unit. Imposing their will on lingering fighters all along this route, they also built trust and endeared

themselves to the Iraqi population along the highway. During the accomplishment of this mission, Barbarian was to reduce the number of Regime holdouts along Highway 6, and intercept a number of terrorist bombers who had been enroute to southern Iraq.

The Division Main CP was established along Highway 6, just to the east of the Diyala Crossroads. The personnel of the Main immediately regretted this choice of CP locations, as it was in the middle of a slaughterhouse-rendering field. The blowing dust and dirt were mixed with animal hair and skin; and the ground was littered with animal bones. The environment motivated the Marines in the Division CP to bring swift support to the attack, as it would get them out of there quickly! The



Murals of Saddam were on nearly every street corner in Baghdad. The local Iraqis had defaced most of these prior to the arrival of the Marines.

shaping and counterbattery fires went on for many hours. From the field, the Division watched the effects of the Division shaping fires first-hand. On those clear nights, the steady glow of the western horizon showed the way to Baghdad.

On the Division's far eastern flank, the Reconnaissance Battalion maintained a blocking position near the intersection of Highway 6 and Highway 27 oriented toward Al Kut. Only two days prior, the Reconnaissance Battalion had blocked the Baghdad Division from the south. Now, they had the same mission, only oriented a different direction, ensuring no threat to the Division's rear along Highway 6. The 200-km jaunt in-between was already receding into memory. By now, the Marines of the Reconnaissance Battalion had their fill of Al Kut, and were eager to get back to the fight at the front of the Division. Their efforts as an economy of force mission here, however, permitted the Division's flow of combat power forward. Having bought time for the Division to close Baghdad with its main assault elements, the battalion sent Alpha and Bravo companies west to link up with the Division Main CP near the Diyala River in anticipation of additional tasking.

The Division's push up Highway 6 continued to stress extended LOCs. The Hantush Highway Airstrip was the nearest KC-130 capable strip and the transfer point for much-needed supplies. The Hantush FARP was workable but required a 150 km round trip that included two crossings of the Tigris to support the Division movement into the suburbs of Baghdad. I MEF was busy establishing An Numaniyah Airfield as a logistics node but it was not yet fully operational. The Division had outraced the supporting logistics effort, and as a result, CSSG-11 had to reach back to 'pull' support forward. In one instance, 11th Marines downloaded their own

logistics trains and made the drive south to retrieve critically needed artillery ammunition when it could not be pushed to them. In another instance, CSSG-11 searched unsuccessfully for MREs, ammunition, and repair parts. The G-4 made repeated requests to forego establishment of intermediate support nodes in order to push support as far forward as possible, but the support plan continued on its established timetable unaltered. The Division continued to live on 'pull-logistics.'

Assessing the situation, both CSSG-11 and 3^d MAW responded magnificently to support the Division. On 4 April, CSSG-11 established a hasty Rapid Refueling Point near Sarabadi Airfield to provide fuel, food, and ammunition. Located along the Division's route of march on Highway 6, it provided easy access and ample storage space for the CSSG. For their part, the MAW evaluated the landing strips at both Sarabadi and Salman Pak East – an airstrip 10 km closer to Baghdad. The Wing chose to use Salman Pak East Airfield as their FARP site, and the MWSG rapidly closed in and expanded the field's capabilities in short order. These two sites satisfied the differing needs of elements of the MAGTF, and together greatly increased the support to the Division.

6 April

To the Banks of the Diyala

RCT-1 arrived along the Diyala eastern corridor and conducted a RIP with RCT-5 at the 'Dead General's Crossroads'. RCT-1 had made its original 200 km march from Highway 7 to An Numaniyah in 24 hours. They had made a second arduous march of 120 km from An Numaniyah to the Diyala crossroads. After covering all that distance, RCT-1 was eager to get back into the fight, and began planning for its own assault crossing of the Diyala. The RCT took its new battlespace south of RCT-5, and assumed responsibility for the cordon along the eastern side of the Diyala River, north of RCT-7. This move set the Division up for its planned course of action in Baghdad. RCT-7 and RCT-1 were poised to attack into Baghdad from the south and east, while RCT-5 had been relieved of its battlespace in the east so it could force a crossing further north and enter the city from the northeast. The entire Division was now in position for the coordinated attack into Baghdad.

As the Division worked to establish its cordon around the city, the 11th Marines continued to provide extensive counterbattery fires against Iraqi artillery firing from within the open areas of the city (stadiums, racetracks, roadways, military complexes) often co-located near noncombatants. In order to minimize collateral damage to noncombatants and civilian infrastructure, many of the radar-acquired targets were passed exclusively to aviation for engagement with precision munitions using the 'quickfire' procedures the Division had practiced back in Camp Pendleton. All targets were vetted with high-resolution imagery to check for potential collateral damage prior to conducting counterfire missions. Artillery targets became fewer and fewer as the 11th Marines gained fires dominance over any would-be Iraqi indirect fire capability, and infantry units overran enemy firing positions.

RCT-5 continued its exhaustive reconnaissance along the banks of the Diyala north of the existing bridges, but found no viable alternatives, except for the Highway Bridge at Baqubah, 50 km to the north. Even the promising site found the previous day by 1st LAR Battalion proved

unsupportable. The difficulty was not the river itself, but the miserable terrain on both sides of it. The area along the Diyala River was very muddy, and was crossed with drainage ditches, canals, and muddy fields. Individual small vehicles in small numbers could make their way to the river's edge using the network of muddy canal roads, but any larger vehicles would not make it. The bridging could be done, but building a road to service the bridge on both sides of the river would eliminate it as a timely option. The maneuver elements might get across, but the RCT commander did not want to get stranded on the far side of the river with no combat trains or logistics support in what could be a logistically intensive fight. Using the existing bridge in Baqubah would require a round trip distance detour of over 100 km, and would depend on securing the bridge intact. It appeared as if RCT-5 would have to use one of the bridges in the south to get across the Diyala.

The Division began to focus intently on the two southern bridges over the Diyala, as these appeared to offer the only intact crossing points into the city. Both bridges were in RCT-7's zone, and 3/4 continued their reconnaissance in force along the eastern banks of the river. The resistance in the suburban area on the nearside approaches to both bridges would prove significant.

Scoping the Diyala Bridges

The town of Az Zafaraniyah was the scene of intensive small arms and RPG fire against the advancing Marines of 3/4. Initially the movement was clear, as CAAT 1 and Kilo Company moved along the road on the southwestern side of the town. With Kilo in place to provide



After the Fedeyeen defenders were driven out, Iraqi citizens welcome the Marines.

overwatch, India Company moved up, dismounted, and began a limited clearing operation in the urban area. It was then that the paramilitary forces in the town initiated their ambush. Numerous RPGs flew at the Marines, but no one suffered a direct hit. The intense exchange of fire lasted for some time, until a well-aimed tank main gun round into the building sheltering the enemy fighters turned the tide. By pushing into the town approximately three blocks on the flanks of the route, India established a buffer zone between urban threats and the road.

As the battalion secured the east side of the canal just short of the bridge, enemy infantry and mortars were sighted across the river, and gunfire was exchanged across the canal. The battalion's Dragon Eye UAV was used to confirm an intelligence report of possible damage to the southern bridge, allowing the battalion's Obstacle Clearing Detachment (OCD) to conduct a more detailed assessment. They found that both of the Diyala bridges had been damaged overnight. The Iraqis had taken advantage of the brief respite, attempting to destroy the two existing bridges, successfully damaging both. The Division would now have to conduct an amphibious assault across the river and build its own bridges for follow-on forces.



The Dragon Eye UAV provided a view of the damaged Southern Bridge over the Diyala River.

As Marines assessed the damage sustained at the southernmost Diyala Bridge, Lieutenant Colonel McCoy decided to move to the river and view the bridge himself. He needed to assess if the gap created by the Iraqi's demolition attempts was narrow enough to support the use of an Armored Vehicle Launched Bridge (AVLB) attached to Bravo Company. Throughout the day, the battalion had received intense but inaccurate AK-47 and RPG fire from across the river. Advancing alone towards the bank of the river, Lieutenant Colonel McCoy quickly began his assessment of the gap and ran through the capabilities he had to address the problem. As he waited in the prone he was surprised to look towards the river to find a French photographer in bright civilian clothes right next to him taking his picture. Initially perturbed about having visitors in civilian clothes drawing fire towards his position, he revised his assessment when he realized that the photographer was between him and the incoming fires. After that, the photographer's bright clothes were a welcome addition to the Diyala River landscape as the commander conducted his leader's reconnaissance.

Later that afternoon, the Division engineer was sent forward to assess the supportability of a Division crossing. The Iraqis had made an attempt to destroy both of the bridges crossing the Diyala Canal. The engineers discovered that the southern bridge had an entire span blown out.

The bridge was damaged beyond repair, and the damage was too wide to span with an AVLB. At the northern site, the Iraqis had blown a hole in the far span of the bridge, and the entire western end of the bridge was sagging. It would require a detailed engineer assessment, but neither crossing looked good. With the engineer reconnaissance that RCT-5 had conducted also coming up empty, the Division had gone from three planned crossings to zero in 24 hours. The Division had crossed oceans and deserts to get to Iraq, had come nearly 500 km into Iraq over two 'big name' rivers, and was now challenged by a ribbon of water that most barely knew the name of.

After being in a heightened chemical defensive posture since before crossing the LD three weeks prior, the Division directed all elements to transition to MOPP Level 0 on 6 April. For the first time in three weeks, Marines would be able to wear something other than their now filthy MOPP suits.

Lieutenant Colonel Chris Conlin's 1/7 moved into a suspected sensitive site about 8 km southeast of Baghdad, the Tuwaitha nuclear facility. It was completely unoccupied and had been partially looted, but was obviously extremely important to the Regime. The facility was encircled by sixty-foot high berms, with bunkers evenly spaced, surrounding the facility. Tuwaitha was the site of the Iraqi atomic energy facility. UN weapons inspectors had recently inspected the site and there was some residual concern about exposure to chemical agents and radiation. The battalion's NBC officer, Chief Warrant Officer Carl Hinson, ran a series of tests to determine that all levels were normal. Elements of 1/7 stayed in the facility overnight waiting for the order to move north. The battalion was relieved of the facility in the morning by Marines from the Combat Engineer Battalion.



An abandoned Iraqi T-72 hidden under the palm trees near the Diyala River.

A Nighttime Assessment of the Diyala Footbridge

In the dark, 3/4 tasked Kilo Company with clearing and supporting the southern bridge approaches. Luckily, there was a damaged footbridge next to the main bridge, that the engineers of Charlie Company, 1st Combat Engineer Battalion decided could be used with some improvisation. Second Lieutenant Daniel Francis and Sergeant Mauricio Guevaracano led the engineer platoon attached to 3/4. As the Marines approached the river, the enemy began fiercely defending the bridges with a high volume of machine gun, RPG, mortar, and artillery fires. Sergeant Guevaracano's squad was one of the first units at the bridge, and they immediately

established fighting positions and returned fire. Upon securing the near bank, Sergeant Guevaracano organized a small bridge reconnaissance team and moved out onto the footbridge to conduct a night reconnaissance. With no cover and being highlighted by flares, he carefully gathered as much information as possible on the bridges before returning to his defensive position. He discovered that the 20-foot gap in the footbridge could be covered with improvised materials from the riverbank. This would allow dismounted infantry to cross the river at the southern bridge site.



Abandoned Iraqi surface-to-air-missiles were found throughout the battlespace. The poor condition of most of these weapons made them unusable.

Crossing dismounted infantry was one thing, but the RCT staff huddled to plan how to project the rest of the RCT's combat capability across the Diyala. RCT-7 had been reinforced with two Bridge Companies, and the engineers assisted in developing a plan that would get the most combat power across the river quickly. It was decided that 1st Tanks would conduct a feint at the northern bridge site, located seven km up-river from the southern bridge. Engineers would conduct an explosive breach of a mine field that lay at the base of the bridge, and the Tank Battalion would drive an AVLB forward to span the damaged section. Meanwhile, 3/4 would continue to flow dismounted forces across the southern footbridge, while the engineers constructed a ribbon bridge a few hundred meters to the north. Once armor crossed the ribbon bridge to reinforce the dismounted Marines, a more permanent Medium Girder Bridge (MGB) would be built over the southern bridge's damaged span. To enable the emplacement of the MGB, 3/4 would conduct an amphibious assault crossing to seize the far bank. LD was set for 0300Z, 7 April. RCT-7 would be conducting the first combat assault crossing operation in this fight.

Intelligence from multiple sources indicated the enemy was trying to concentrate reinforcements and indirect fire assets opposite RCT-7's planned crossing points. To support Colonel Hummer's attack, Colonel John Toolan of RCT-1 proposed a supporting attack that included an assault crossing of the Diyala on RCT-7's northern flank. Newly arrived, short on

food, but full of motivation, RCT-1 would use their AAV's to swim across. They would thrust into the city on the northern flank and draw pressure off the Division's main effort, RCT-7. The Division CG quickly approved the plan.

In for a Penny

The Division expanded its planning for the operation in Baghdad. If there was to be an assault river crossing operation into the City, then there no longer appeared to be a severable line between establishing a cordon and maneuvering forces into the city. The CG tasked the G-2 with coming up with the objectives for a Division attack into the city, and the G-2 produced a list of 27 Regime targets, gleaned from the lists of SSE sites, Regime strongpoints, government offices, media centers, and recent intelligence reporting. Securing each of these sites would demonstrate the Coalition's intent to disarm the Regime and liberate the populace. In preparation for the attack, map packages on these 27 targets were printed and disseminated. If the Division was going into the city, it would at least be going in with a sense of what it needed to accomplish. A large number of these objectives were located in the Rasheed military complex just over the river from RCT-7. As a 'middle ground' between establishing the cordon and actually securing eastern Baghdad, seizing the Rasheed complex could be considered part of an outer cordon that offered a superb launch platform for continued attacks or raids into the city. The Division established objectives in the Rasheed complex for the initial attack by RCT-7 in the south, and defined the perimeter road around the complex as a limit of advance. Forcing the door open a crack at Rasheed would allow the rest of the Division to flow through and complete the cordon. The Division effected boundary adjustments to afford all 3 RCTs battlespace east of the Diyala so that they could effectively employ indirect fires in the coming assault.

The Division's flanks were secured by the LAR battalions, with 3^d LAR Battalion screening the northeastern flank of the Division battlespace to protect against counterattacks by remnants of the Al Nida Division. Third LAR conducted a RIP with RCT-1, enabling the RCT to continue the attack into Baghdad with all of its combat power. The Wolfpack zone now extended for nearly 30 km, as it established its screen to the east. The Battalion continued to screen to the east until ordered to join Task Force Tripoli on 12 April. Second LAR Battalion continued to provide LOC security from An Numaniyah to the Diyala crossroads, aggressively keeping the MSR open for transportation of critically needed supplies.

Far to the south and east, members of the Division were fighting another battle against the terrain. On 3 April, four M1A1 tanks and one M88 tank retriever had become mired in the muck on the south bank of the Tigris across from Al Aziziyah. Two tanks had pulled into what they thought was an open field to set in for the night. When they went to move the next morning, they found themselves mired in mud, completely unable to move. The M88 retriever sent in to pull them out suffered the same fate. A third M1A1 was a mobility kill due to enemy fire and the last inoperable due to transmission failure. RCT-5 had evacuated the crews, passed grids for recovery to CSSC-115, and moved up Highway 6 to continue to press the enemy. Major Greg Frich, the Division Ordnance Readiness Officer, led a recovery team and security force to the site on 6 April. By the time they arrived, the tanks and retriever that were stuck in the field had slowly sunk to the level of their turrets, and the mobility kill tank had been pushed off the road into the Tigris. Master Sergeant Mike Hamlett, Staff Sergeant Shane Perry, and Staff Sergeant Kevin Jones drew on years of experience to solve the problem. Trees felled from the

surrounding area were laid across the field to support the CSSB-10 retrievers. Sergeant Michael Zutz and Corporal Jesse Pogodzinski used excavators to clear away dirt and build earthen ramps for additional support. The light enemy activity in the northwest tree line was quickly resolved with some medium machinegun fire. The first retriever attached a cable to the tank while the second retriever attached a cable to the first in daisy chain fashion. As the first retriever began to sink pulling out the tank, the second pulled it out. At the end of the first day, the first M1A1 was successfully extracted. Using tow bars on the South River Road, the team returned to the security of Captain Erich Krumrei's 8th ESB perimeter near the Pearl 3 crossing at An Numaniyah. The second and third days would see the same operation – starting well before first light, continuing through the day, and returning 45 miles to the secure perimeter at night – under the watchful eyes of the security team led by Sergeant William Roper from CSSB-10's MP detachment. In five days, the 16-Marine team salvaged all four M1A1s and the M88 that had been reported as unrecoverable. Even the Mesopotamian marshes that had denied attacking armies for millennia could not stand up to the resourcefulness and stubbornness of the United States Marines.



Recovering these M-88 and M1A1s from the unforgiving Iraqi muck south of the Tigris proved a tremendous challenge.

